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ABSTRACT

This report presents the findings of the third year of a three-year study of Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention (SAPIS) programs in New York City public schools. The first part of the final-year study was a survey of students previously contacted. The second part was a qualitative study of students receiving counseling. The goals of the three years of studies were to better understand: (1) the lives of at-risk students; (2) the intervention process; and (3) the impact of intervention on students' lives. Counseling had a positive impact on the majority of students. They reported improved academic performance during the second year of counseling, as well as improvement in handling their personal lives. Students were asked to report on the successful and difficult characteristics of the intervention programs. Reported benefits include the following: (1) trust and respect between counselor and student; (2) ability to express difficult feelings; (3) healthier friendships; and (4) a sense of empowerment induced by a better understanding of what can and cannot be changed in their lives. The problems with intervention as perceived by the students were: (1) sharing painful feelings; (2) confronting problems and accepting limitations; (3) scheduling and time constraints; and (4) involuntary termination of counseling. (KM)

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ED 371 252

OREA Report

SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION YEAR-THREE STUDY: INTERVENTION SERVICES

MARCH 1994

CG025386

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

In 1990, the Office of Substance Abuse Prevention Programs (SAPP) and the Chancellor of the Board of Education of the City of New York requested that the Office of Educational Research (OER) undertake a three-year study of substance abuse prevention and intervention programs in the public schools. This report covers the third and final year (1992-93) of that study.*

The research presented here builds upon the first two years of the study and includes three components: 1) the second year of a survey of students (220) who received substance abuse intervention services in 31 sample schools; 2) a qualitative study of intervention services for which evaluators interviewed eight Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Specialists (SAPIS) and 25 students from the survey sample; and 3) a data report of three years of school performance measures, including promotion information, math test scores, and attendance rates for the same sample of students who participated in the survey.

FINDINGS

Introduction to Counseling and Assessment of Student Needs

According to interviews with SAPIS and students, most students who go into counseling do so after being referred by a school staff member or a friend, although many students seek the counseling themselves. Through intake interviews, and in some cases writing exercises, students are assessed to determine their specific needs and how best to address them. For most students, group counseling is recommended. Those who are in particularly difficult or dangerous situations are generally placed in individual counseling and/or referred to an outside agency.

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* For additional information on the 1990-91 and 1991-92 studies, refer to the following Office of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment of the Board of Education of the City of New York reports:

Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Programs in New York City Public Schools. March 1992.

Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Programs in New York City Public Schools: The 1991-1992 School Year. October, 1993.

Substance Abuse Prevention Services in the New York City Public Schools: 1990-1991 Survey Results. November, 1993.

Presenting Problems

The students who participated in this study faced a variety of "presenting problems;" i.e., the problems that led to their referral for counseling. Often, students were referred because of a problem at school; sleeping in class, skipping school, poor grades, conflicts with teachers, fighting, and drug or alcohol abuse were among those identified. Once in counseling, other, family-related problems came to light, including divorce or separation of parents, death in the family, incarceration of a family member, substance abuse in the family, violence (family and school), and sexual abuse.

Impact of Counseling on Students

Virtually all of the students (97 percent) reported positive changes in their lives as a result of counseling. They felt better about themselves, improved their academic performance, developed better relationships with the people around them, and were more optimistic about their futures.

In their survey responses, 77 percent of students demonstrated increased self-esteem resulting from counseling. Interviews revealed that they felt better about their lives and their ability to handle problems, and they liked themselves more. They also engaged in fewer negative behaviors, and better resisted negative peer pressure.

Survey scores on the school performance cluster of questions showed that 88 percent of students felt they were doing better in school since receiving counseling. More students reported academic improvement in the second year of the survey than the first. In their interviews, students reported cutting classes less often, being absent from school less frequently, studying more, getting better grades, and graduating on time.

For each year of the study, evaluators also looked at objective measures of school performance for the students surveyed. Mean math test scores remained the same from year to year--at or above average. Grade level increased for 88 to 96 percent of the students and attendance rates were more or less the same from year to year.

According to survey results, virtually all of the students (99 percent) improved their life skills as a result of counseling. Both survey and interview responses showed that their relationships with peers, teachers, and family members had improved. They were also more ambitious and optimistic about their futures.

Contributions to, and Challenges of, Successful Intervention

Students and SAPIS were asked to discuss the characteristics of counseling that contributed most to successful intervention. The students credited: the trust and respect of, and for, the counselor; the ability to express difficult feelings; new, healthier friendships; and a sense of empowerment produced by a clearer understanding of what they can and cannot change. SAPIS thought that the support of teachers, the concern and involvement of parents, the motivation of the students, and healthy, supportive friendships and/or social networks were critical to the effectiveness of counseling.

Interviewers also asked students and SAPIS to comment on the things that make counseling difficult. Students identified: expressing and sharing painful feelings, confronting problems and responsibility, recognizing and accepting limitations, scheduling and time constraints, and involuntary termination of services. SAPIS listed unsupportive teachers or families, unmotivated students, and scheduling and time constraints.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Judging from the findings, many of the students who participated in this study endure extremely difficult lives. According to both the students and the SAPIS, counseling provides a safe place to explore the students' feelings and begin to address their problems. The counselors are a steady, supportive presence in the students' lives. Students reported feeling better about themselves, and coping better with their lives. They also developed better relationships with the people around them, did better in school, and were more optimistic about their futures. Those who were no longer receiving counseling did just as well as those who were, demonstrating the enduring effects of counseling one year after termination.

Ultimately, it is not possible to derive definitive results about the long-term effects of counseling from a two-year study. Given the difficulties faced by the students who participated in this study, the duration of the counseling they received (two academic years at most) is a short time in which to see profound changes and to know if the changes will endure. It is a particularly short time in which to determine how those who have discontinued services will fare in the long term, and how much they might benefit from additional counseling.

Based on the findings of this study, OER evaluators recommend that:

- additional research follow students who have received counseling for more than two academic years to get a better understanding of the long-term effects of counseling;

- additional research follow students who have discontinued counseling (voluntarily and involuntarily) after a year or more of services to see if the positive effects of counseling endure;

- schools expand and strengthen counseling services by increasing administration and staff support of SAPIS' efforts. In-house training and workshops would keep personnel informed and enable them to facilitate SAPIS' efforts;

- SAPIS techniques be further explored and the results of that exploration disseminated to all SAPIS; and,

- liaisons between community and school-based counseling programs be strengthened to provide more comprehensive services to high-risk students.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report has been prepared by the Office of Educational Research (OER) of the Division of Strategic Planning/Research and Assessment. It is part of a three-year study requested by the Office of Substance Abuse Prevention Programs and the Chancellor of the Board of Education of the City of New York. It represents the contributions of many people. The third year evaluation team, comprised of Jessica Colley, Patricia DeArcy, Nina Gottlieb, Lynne Manzo, and Margaret Schehl, developed the ideas and methods, conducted the field research, analyzed data and wrote various portions of the report. Special recognition is given to Margaret Schehl for putting together the various pieces into a final report, and to Mabel Payne who supervised and advised the research team.

Many thanks go to the staff of the Office of Substance Abuse Prevention whose continued assistance made this report possible, including Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Specialists in the participating schools who provided services to students. Many thanks also go to student participants who generously shared their experiences and time with us. Their valiant struggle to improve their lives was both humbling and inspirational.

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I. INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

In 1990, at the request of the then Office of Substance Abuse Prevention Programs and the Chancellor of the Board of Education of the City of New York, the Office of Educational Research (OER) undertook a three-year study of substance abuse prevention and intervention services in the public schools. This is a report of the third and final year of the study.*

Year-One Research

In the first year of research, OER evaluators surveyed all New York City public schools to determine which services were available in each school. Furthermore, in order to document the goals, problems and strategies of successful programs, they also looked more closely at 24 schools considered by district Substance Abuse Prevention Program Directors to have exemplary substance abuse prevention and intervention programs.

OER evaluators found that the programs that most effectively addressed the issues of students at risk of abusing substances

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* For additional information on the 1990-91 and 1991-92 studies, refer to the following Office of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment of the Board of Education of the City of New York reports:

Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Programs in New York City Public Schools. March 1992.

Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Programs in New York City Public Schools: The 1991-1992 School Year. October, 1993.

Substance Abuse Prevention Services in the New York City Public Schools: 1990-1991 Survey Results. November, 1993.

generally shared a certain configuration of services and characteristics. They were broadly conceived programs, offering an array of services that addressed different aspects of students' lives, including school performance, family problems, and relationships with peers. In addition, these programs were characterized by strong links to the community and relatively easy access to resources. Also critical to their success was the presence of dedicated, caring staff members in numbers sufficient to meet students' needs, and an overall school context that was supportive of the substance abuse prevention and intervention program.

Year-Two Research

In year-two of the study, 20 new schools were added to the sample of schools being investigated. They represented a complete range of service configurations rather than just exemplary programs. The second year's research included two major components. In the first component, researchers looked more closely at the sample schools' staff development, parent involvement, and peer leadership programs to better understand their roles in substance abuse prevention and intervention, and also examined the organization and effectiveness of the SPARK Peer Player program (which uses performing arts as an informational counseling tool).

In the second component, using the same sample of schools, evaluators undertook a longitudinal survey of students receiving intervention services. Students from all grades who were

receiving intervention services were surveyed to obtain their personal assessments of the impact of counseling on their school and home lives and on their self-esteem.

The findings were very promising. Students reported that since participating in intervention services, they had made progress in a number of important ways; their grades went up, they developed better relationships with teachers, and they learned such critical life skills as decision-making and dealing with anger and stress. Several students even commented that the program had helped them to overcome suicidal wishes. Furthermore, students' survey scores were higher with additional weeks of counseling services; that is, the longer students received counseling, the better they said their lives were.

Year-Three Research

In this, the third year of the study, OER surveyed students for a second time. However, the positive results of the first year of the student survey suggested the need for additional research to obtain more detailed information on the lives of students receiving counseling, the impact of counseling on them, and the exact characteristics of counseling that make it effective. In year-three, evaluators undertook a qualitative study to meet this need. Using in-depth interviews to obtain a richer, more personal sense of the impact of intervention services on student lives, evaluators sought information on

students' self-esteem, school performance, and life skills* in their second year of intervention services, as well as information on the characteristics of counseling that make it work.

For comparison to students' self-statements about changes resulting from participation in counseling, OER evaluators produced a three-year report of objective school performance measures including attendance rates, math test scores, and promotion information, as well.

It is important to state from the outset that this study did not seek to compare at risk students who receive intervention services to the general student population, or indeed to anyone. The objective of this study was to better understand a) the lives of at risk students, b) the intervention process, and c) the impact of intervention on the lives of at risk students, in order to assess the need for, and effectiveness of, this service.

METHODS

The methods used to implement these three components--the second year survey, the qualitative piece, and the objective outcomes piece--vary and are described separately below.

The Student Survey: the Second Year

Questionnaire revision. The survey used in year-one to assess the impact of counseling on students sought to measure changes in three main areas--self-esteem, school performance, and

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* This includes relationships with family members, teachers, and peers; coping- and decision-making skills; and dealing with difficult feelings.

life skills. For this, the second year of the survey, evaluators made minor revisions to the instrument to clarify questions. Once the instrument was revised, OER evaluators held a workshop for the participating SAPIS* from the 37 sample schools to provide both information on the purpose of the study and instruction on how to administer the surveys to students in their schools. In addition, they solicited feedback on survey questions to further refine the instrument. Survey instruments were then finalized for distribution to participating schools.

Sample selection. In order to determine which students were available to participate in this year's study, the evaluation team sent rosters of last year's participants to the SAPIS in each school to complete and return to OER. These rosters listed the names and student identification numbers of the 1992-1993 study participants. For each student, SAPIS were asked to indicate:

- if the student was still in the school;
- if the student had received services during the 1992-93 school year;
- if the student was available to do the survey;
- if the student had received individual or group counseling, or both;
- the date the student commenced services in 1992-93;
- the number of weeks the student participated in counseling services in 1992-93;

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* Although both SAPIS from community school districts and SPARKS from high schools participated in this study, they will all be referred to as SAPIS or counselors in this report.

- the average number of counseling sessions the student attended per week; and,
- the end date, if any, for services received by the student in 1992-93.

Once the rosters were completed and returned to the evaluation team, the appropriate number of surveys, for those students still receiving counseling, and those no longer in counseling, were sent to each school to be administered by the SAPIS.

Evaluators drew the names of all students to be surveyed and/or interviewed in year-two from the base, year-one student survey sample. For the year-two survey, they selected a sub-sample consisting of all available students from the first year's survey. The year-two student survey respondents came from 12 elementary, 12 middle, and seven high schools.

Two-hundred-twenty students (63 percent) in the 31 sample schools responded to the survey. Seven of the schools that were in the sample during the 1991-92 school year did not participate in this year's study because they no longer had students in their caseload who had participated in last year's study. Two SAPIS were relocated to different schools, and one refused to participate because of concerns about confidentiality.*

Data collection. OER evaluators had some difficulty collecting completed surveys. This was partly the result of

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* At the survey revision meetings SAPIS were concerned about protecting students' anonymity. Evaluators explained that students' identification would only be used for tracking, access to the data would be restricted, and student anonymity would be protected.

problems in the distribution of the surveys which delayed administration of the survey. For example, some SAPIS did not have offices in the schools where they worked so their mail was either held, misplaced, or mailed to their district office where they sometimes report as infrequently as once a week.

Furthermore, because surveys were distributed toward the end of the school year, SAPIS had limited time to administer them to students. In some cases the delay occurred after the SAPIS had received the surveys, because of difficulty reaching individual students. Some students, despite being identified as available on the OER roster, had moved or transferred to another school by the time the surveys were actually administered. It was also particularly difficult for SAPIS to administer surveys to students who were no longer receiving services, since they no longer saw these students on a regular basis.

Evaluators made follow-up telephone calls to SAPIS who did not return surveys within two weeks. Several SAPIS were difficult to reach because they were not full-time counselors in the school, or because they did not have a direct phone line. After six weeks, OER evaluators asked District Directors to help them obtain rosters from SAPIS who had still not returned surveys.

Data analysis. Evaluators clustered and scored survey questions in three broad categories: school performance, life

skills, and self-esteem (See Appendix I for survey scoring).* Responses to each of these clusters were first scored separately, and then combined to create a total score of each student's self-assessment since entering counseling services.

Of the students who responded to the survey, 61 percent received group counseling and 51 percent received individual counseling; many received both. An additional ten percent were in specialized COA/COSA** groups and nine percent were in discussion rap groups. Sixty percent (133) were still receiving counseling, and 40 percent (80) were no longer receiving counseling.

Evaluators were unable to pursue certain areas of analysis due to flawed data. Although it was a goal of this study to test the 1992-93 finding that students with more time in counseling scored higher on the survey, problems with the data made this impossible. Either the information was not provided, or it was provided incorrectly, resulting in unusable data. Similarly, responses to the survey question on number of people in the student's household and their relationship to the student completing the survey were sporadic and often misleading, so no analyses of these variables were possible.

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* The group of questions that comprised the self-esteem cluster did not include the question on whether students liked themselves more, less, the same, or didn't know. The results of that question are, nevertheless, reported with the findings on self-esteem.

** COA - children of alcoholics, COSA - children of substance abusers.

Evaluators conducted still other analyses, but they revealed no clear trends. For that reason they are not presented in the findings. They include the relationship between survey scores and gender, age/grade, type of service received, number of services received, and intervention status (i.e., whether or not the student was still in counseling). For this reason, the survey results will not be disaggregated by any of these variables in the analysis, but will be reported for the entire sample of 220 students.

Qualitative Study

Instrument development. OER evaluators developed interview guides for use in interviews with a sub-sample of students from the 1991-1992 survey sample and their SAPIS. Student interview questions focused on the circumstances surrounding a student's introduction to counseling, the impact of counseling on their lives, and their perceptions of the most important aspects of counseling and the most difficult.

For the SAPIS interviews, OER evaluators sought to isolate as much detailed information as possible on how students are introduced to counseling, how they are assessed, techniques used in counseling (See Appendix II), factors considered to be critical to success, and factors that make successful intervention difficult.

Sample selection. OER evaluators selected a sample of students to be interviewed from the roster's list of available students. The sample included students who had low, medium, and

high scores on the 1991-92 survey; had low, medium, and high numbers of weeks in services in 1991-92; were from four of the five boroughs; and attended primary, middle, and high schools.

Evaluators conducted in-depth interviews with twenty-five students from eight target schools, and the eight corresponding SAPIS. The sample was almost equally divided between boys (48 percent) and girls (52 percent). Many of these students reported having been in counseling for some time, from 12 weeks to three-and-a-half years.

Most students were still receiving counseling services at the time of the interviews (64 percent), but some (32 percent) were no longer in counseling. Sixty-eight percent of the students who participated in the survey had received individual counseling, of them 40 percent had received other counseling, such as COA/COSA, as well. Sixty-eight percent of those surveyed had received group counseling; of this group, 36 percent had received another form of counseling as well. Fully 32 percent of the students had received more than one type of counseling. Students' grade levels ranged from grade six through 12.

Data collection. Teams of two evaluators conducted interviews with students and SAPIS from each of the participating schools--one to take notes, while the other conducted the interview. This enabled the interviewer to fully engage the students, allowing each one to speak freely and expansively, providing detailed personal information on the conditions of their lives, their experience of counseling, and the impact of

counseling on their lives. This interview method also proved fruitful in gaining valuable information on issues important to the counselor.

Data analysis. As a qualitative inquiry, with a small sample size (25 students and eight SAPIS), the output of this component of the study is its rich, descriptive detail. The information obtained from interviews with the students and the SAPIS serves to enhance and make more vivid the findings from the survey, adding another, deeper dimension to those findings. Evaluators analyzed the interview results with this in mind, allowing the students' descriptions of the reality of their day-to-day lives--not statistics--to tell the story.

Objective Outcomes

Sample selection and data retrieval. For the same sub-sample of students that were surveyed this year, OER evaluators also looked at objective outcome measures. In order to compare students' reports of academic improvement with hard data, evaluators obtained three years of promotion information, math test scores*, and attendance rates for each student who participated in the survey, from three Board of Education centrally-maintained databases.

Data analysis. Evaluators followed the original sample of students for each of the three years of the study to track changes from year to year. They aggregated the data and obtained

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* OREA evaluators planned to look at reading test scores as well as math, but the scores were unavailable through central database files.

frequencies and a mean test score and attendance rate for each year, as well as frequencies of students advancing a grade for each year. They then analyzed the data to determine whether students advanced a grade each year, and whether their test scores and attendance rates increased, decreased, or remained the same. Evaluators also looked for the amount of change, positive or negative.

SCOPE OF REPORT

In the next section, Chapter II, the findings of the third year study are reported. This includes a discussion of the introduction to counseling services; assessment of student needs; impact of counseling on students; characteristics of counseling that contribute to successful intervention; and difficulties encountered by students and counselors. In Chapter III, conclusions and recommendations are discussed.

II. FINDINGS

The third year of this study yielded important information on how students are introduced to counseling services, the impact of those services on students' lives, students' and SAPIS' perceptions of what makes counseling effective, and what contributes to, and inhibits, successful counseling.

INTRODUCTION TO COUNSELING SERVICES

According to the SAPIS that OER evaluators interviewed, students were introduced to counseling in a number of different ways. Principal among these were referral by school staff members, self-referral, and referral by a friend.

School Staff Member Referral

In interviews, three of the SAPIS said that their initial contact with students usually occurs in classroom presentations during which students are introduced to the Substance Abuse Prevention program and the services it provides. However, they added, students are often referred for counseling by teachers based on problems in the classroom, lateness, and truancy. When a student is sleeping in class, or refuses to go home at the end of the day, or has poor hygiene (sometimes an indication of homelessness), some teachers will refer them to the SAPIS. From there the SAPIS takes over.

In the student interviews, 36 percent of those interviewed said that they were referred to the Substance Abuse Prevention Program by a school staff member such as a teacher or the SAPIS. According to one sixth grader: "In fifth grade, I had a lot of

problems. I didn't get along with other students. My teacher told me I should start talking to [the SAPIS] .... Yeah, I agreed. I had problems."

Clearly, teacher referrals can be of valuable assistance to both the student and the SAPIS. However, when a student is referred to the SAPIS, instead of volunteering themselves into counseling, they may be less open to the idea of counseling, afraid of being stigmatized as "users." According to one SAPIS, when this happens "I am honest. I tell them I am not sure what is going on, and ... ask them [to explain]. They know why they are here. This helps them to open up." Similarly, another SAPIS tells the student, "you're not here because your teacher thinks you're taking drugs or alcohol, but because your teachers see you're not coming in on time or whatever, and they wonder if you need to talk about something."

Self Referral

According to SAPIS interviews, students commonly refer themselves for services. Although some students are very clear about what is bothering them and what they are seeking from the counseling, others are not always able to articulate their particular problems to the SAPIS. In the latter case, through sensitive listening and inquiry, the SAPIS can begin to understand and address the student's problems.

Of the students interviewed, many came to counseling of their own accord (48 percent). In most cases, they knew that they wanted help, even when they didn't completely understand

what was bothering them. As one junior high school student explained, "I just had to talk to somebody. They [the SAPIS office] were open, so I just started coming." Typically, they came because they "had no one to talk to" and were frightened. One high school student explained, "I was pregnant and didn't know what to do. I was real scared. I didn't want to talk to my parents, but I wanted to talk to an adult." Similarly, a junior high school student remarked: "I had a lot of problems at home and I felt lonely. I was scared and by myself. I didn't have anyone to talk to."

Referral by a Friend

Still other students said a friend who was familiar with the program recommended they see the SAPIS (16 percent). One young woman explained, "My best friend started Project Friend as a peer leader and she said I should join. So I came one day and talked to someone. I had no one else to talk to. I agreed with my friend that I needed counseling. Because my mom was never around, so I didn't have anyone to talk to."

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT NEEDS

Once students have been to the SAPIS office and expressed an interest in counseling, the SAPIS does an assessment to determine the best course of action for that student.

All of the SAPIS interviewed offer both individual and group counseling. In addition, several offer other, specialized types of counseling such as counseling for children of alcoholics and children of substance abusers (COA/COSA); lunch outreach groups,

where students meet during their lunch break to discuss issues of importance to them; and groups created with a specific ethnic or cultural emphasis.

Intake Interviews

Five of the SAPIS explained to interviewers that the intake interview was their primary assessment tool. It is a way, according to one SAPIS, "to find out what's going on in the student's life." According to another, if a student is referred for sleeping in class, "I want to see if they're on medication, just not feeling well, or if they're experimenting with drugs. I just introduce myself, and we talk and find out what's going on." Although students are not always able to articulate exactly what the problem is, the SAPIS can observe "... their body language [and] their eye contact. It's how they say things, as well as what they say, that is important."

Other SAPIS use different assessment strategies which consist of having students write letters or keep journals or diaries. As one SAPIS explains: "I have them write to 'Dear Abby' .... I show a movie that kids can maybe identify with, and then they can share their problems with me through the letters .... On the basis of those letters, I take them in for counseling."

Individual Counseling or Referral to an Outside Agency

When dealing with students who are involved in a particularly precarious situation, or for whom group counseling does not seem to be working, some SAPIS recommend individual

counseling and/or referral to an outside agency. One SAPIS explained: "I have a lot of students who are dealing with rape and incest, so we don't discuss that in a group." Another felt the same way: "I focus on the child's needs. For example, I would refer them to a psychologist, psychiatrist, for reasons like sexual abuse, suicide."

Group Counseling

In most cases, students are encouraged to consider group counseling even when they are receiving individual counseling. One SAPIS places students in a group when they show a need for bonding. Often the SAPIS will identify a friend of a student considered for a group and place the friend in the same group for additional support. SAPIS counselors also group students by temperament and personality to optimize compatibility of group members. Some allow the students to choose either individual or group counseling for themselves.

Time Limitations

Unfortunately, according to three SAPIS, in some cases, it is scheduling constraints and burgeoning caseloads that determine the amount and type of counseling a student receives. One primary school SAPIS felt very conflicted about being assigned to an additional school this year and having to terminate some of last year's students to accommodate the new ones. According to another: "One of the biggest problems is scheduling--stuff that we're pulled out for, cancellation of this or that other thing, citywide testing, etc."

PRESENTING PROBLEMS

The students interviewed for this study faced a variety of "presenting problems," i.e. the problems that led to their referral to counseling. Often it was a problem at school that prompted the referral. Sleeping in class, skipping school, poor grades, conflicts with teachers, fighting, and drug or alcohol abuse, were among those identified. But once in counseling, other problems were revealed--family-related problems, including divorce or separation of parents, death in the family, incarceration of a family member, substance abuse in the family, violence, and sexual abuse. These problems resulted in feelings of pain, confusion, depression, and anger which were manifested in problems at school.

Many students struggled with low self-esteem and depression. One junior high school student explained, "I was always down ... unhappy all the time. I never smiled. Every day I was in an upset mood."

Many students spoke about being angry and feeling out of control of their lives and their feelings. Often these feelings led to arguments and/or violence. "I came because I had too much anger. Me and my parents just started fighting and arguing," said one student. In the words of another: "I got into a lot of fights."

Furthermore, according to one of the SAPIS that evaluators interviewed, most of the students she counsels have some substance abuse experience.

> All of my students have some substance abuse experience. Either they use, did use, or someone in the family uses. That doesn't come out initially, but I sometimes get a sense of it from the way they talk about some other presenting problems. They may be just experimenting, even if it's just smoking cigarettes.

Students described the circumstances at home that contributed to their problems at school. According to one eighth-grade student: "I used to come to school drunk a lot and I was always upset .... Right before my father came home from jail, we talked a lot about my father and my drinking. I talked about problems at home that made me come to school upset."

Another student, trying to adjust to divorce and a new relationships in his parents' lives, said, "My mother had a new boyfriend. My feelings towards my father were tough then. I hated him and the person he was having an affair with." Still another student explained, "I don't like my step-father. He used to hit us. He doesn't hit us anymore, but he yells a lot. He treats his real daughter better."

Often, several family problems were compounded in the same household--a complex web of interconnecting problems, as one high school student demonstrated:

> My grandfather was drinking heavily. My father was abusing prescription drugs and abusing me. My mother was an alcoholic. I got a court order, at one point, against my father. I stayed away from my father for about two weeks. My father is out of the house now, but I still feel he doesn't care for me.

The biggest difficulty for some students was figuring out how to cope with these problems--who to turn to when the family was the source of the problem. Many of these students started

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counseling because they had nowhere else to turn, no one to open up to and talk with about their problems. "I felt by talking that I could get my feelings out, at least it would be better than it used to be. [Now] I feel better; I feel relieved."

IMPACT OF COUNSELING ON STUDENTS

Evidently, having someone to talk to did help. Both survey and interview participants reported remarkable changes in their lives. Just as problems in one domain of students' lives created problems in others, improvement in one domain often led to improvement in others. As a result of counseling, students felt better about themselves, improved their academic performance, developed better relationships with the people around them, and became more optimistic about their futures.

Overall, most students demonstrated an improvement in each of the three areas explored by the survey: school performance, life skills, and self-esteem. (See Table 1)

TABLE 1
STUDENTS' VIEWS OF OVERALL PROGRESS
SINCE PARTICIPATING IN COUNSELING SERVICES
1992-93 (n=220)

Survey Cluster	Decrease (%)	No change (%)	Increase (%)
School Performance	10	4	86
Life Skills	--	1	99
Self-Esteem	13	10	77
Total Score	2	1	97

- Nearly all students reported improvement in each of the categories.

Self-Esteem

Students' survey responses showed improvement in all measures of self-esteem. Table 2 provides data on students' views of themselves since receiving counseling, and compares students' views of themselves in the first and second year of the survey. In this year's survey, the majority of students indicated that, since participating in counseling, they feel good about the way they act (58 percent), and make positive decisions (51 percent) *most of the time*. Almost as many said they cope with difficulties (46 percent) better, *most of the time*. Furthermore, the majority of students said that only *once in a while* do they feel unhappy with themselves (66 percent), or do things they shouldn't (61 percent). Most said they feel not as smart as other students *once in a while* (35 percent) or *just about never* (43 percent), or that they have no talent *once in a while* (25 percent) or *just about never* (62 percent).

Furthermore, 50 percent of students said they like themselves more since participating in counseling, while only four percent felt worse. Thirty-one percent felt about the same, and 15 percent of the students were not sure how they felt about themselves. These results are similar to those for the same question in the 1991-92 survey.

TABLE 2
STUDENTS' VIEWS OF SELF SINCE PARTICIPATING IN COUNSELING
1991-92 (n=891) and 1992-93 (n=220)

	Most of the time (%)		Once in a while (%)		Just about never (%)		No response (%)	
Do you ...	91-92	92-93	91-92	92-93	91-92	92-93	91-92	92-93
Feel good about how you act	55	58	35	31	8	9	2	2
Make positive decisions	49	51	37	41	10	7	4	1
Cope with difficulties	45	46	41	42	10	11	4	1
Do things you shouldn't	26	21	53	61	19	16	2	2
Feel not as smart as other students	20	21	43	35	34	43	3	1
Feel unhappy with yourself	17	21	54	66	26	12	3	1
Feel you have no talent	11	11	31	25	54	62	4	2

- In the 1991-92 survey, 43 to 55 percent of students identified with positive self statements *most of the time*, compared to 46 to 58 percent for 1992-93.

Our interviews with students revealed even greater improvement in self-esteem. After counseling, students felt better about their lives and their ability to handle problems. They reported feeling less depressed and less stressed. And, importantly, they liked themselves more.

One junior high school student commented: "I feel better about myself. Before, I was a hoodlum, I was bad. Now, I am not

like that. I grew up." A high school senior explained that she felt more sure of herself and what she wanted in life. "I can be my own person. I don't let anyone make my decisions now." Another high school student remarked: "I feel less shy. I can go over to people and talk to them. Coming to group has changed my attitude. Before, I didn't care; now I do. Now I see that something positive can happen." Another student said: "In the sixth grade, I used to think that I was nothing, that I stunk. Now I think that I am something."

Improved self-esteem also helped those who were really angry to get a better handle on their feelings. One sixth grader explained: "I used to have a really bad temper. I had no patience. I used to lose control. Now I've changed. I feel a lot better. I'm not involved in any fights any more. I thought I was tough, but I really disliked myself. Now, I like myself."

School Performance

Students' views of their school performance were very promising, as well. Fully 86 percent of those surveyed felt they had improved in overall performance, up from 36 percent in 1992. Furthermore, in each of the eight measures of school performance, more students reported improvement in the 1993 survey than the 1992 survey. Only four to 16 percent of students reported a decline in performance in any of the categories, while 34 to 64 percent of students felt they had improved in each of the categories. The number of students reporting no change in performance decreased in all categories from 1992 to 1993; and

judging from the distribution of responses, most were performing better in the second year.

TABLE 3
STUDENTS' VIEWS OF PROGRESS IN SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SINCE PARTICIPATING IN COUNSELING SERVICES
1991-92 (n=891) and 1992-93 (n=220)

School Performance	Improved Performance (%)		No Change (%)		Worsened Performance (%)		Not Sure (%)	
	91-92	92-93	91-92	92-93	91-92	92-93	91-92	92-93
Grades	50	64	34	20	6	8	10	8
Relationships with Teachers	47	54	37	35	7	5	10	6
Classwork	44	54	47	34	4	6	7	6
Attendance	37	44	44	41	3	4	15	11
Homework	36	47	49	38	6	10	8	5
Lateness	33	46	48	30	8	16	10	6
Cutting Class	30	34	44	31	8	8	16	14
Overall Progress	32	86	46	4	5	10	7	--

- In each of the categories, more students felt they had improved in the second year (34 to 64 percent) than in the first year of the survey (30 to 50 percent).

When students were surveyed about their perceptions of their school progress, 36 percent said they were proud and 44 percent felt it was "okay." Only 17 percent were not satisfied with their performance. In addition, a majority of students (57 percent) felt that being a good student was "very important" and an additional 38 percent felt it was "somewhat important."

Again, the survey findings were reinforced and elaborated upon in student interviews. Students reported performing much better in school as a result of counseling. They told evaluators that they were cutting classes less often, were absent from school less frequently, were studying more and getting better grades, and were graduating on time.

One junior high school student said: "It was harder to come to school before counseling. I'm not absent anymore." Similarly, a high school student confided: "If I hadn't been in the group, I would have been cutting classes more." Still another student said she felt more motivated in school: "I'm not as late as I used to be. And I'm getting my homework done everyday."

Students were proud of improvement in their grades. One junior high school student remarked: "In the beginning, I started messing up, getting low grades. [The SAPIS] gave me a push .... So then I started to do better. My mom doesn't give me that. I went from a 59 to a 90 average."

Many students who were on the verge of being retained another year were graduating instead. One junior high school student said: "At first, I was behind and I didn't think I was going to graduate. [The SAPIS] put me in another class, and now I'm doing well. I'm going to graduate." Another junior high school student proudly said, "... now, I will graduate in two weeks," and another said: "Before I wasn't going to graduate. But now I pulled my grades up and I am graduating. I realized

that if anything bad happens I couldn't blame it on anyone else. It was up to me."

Objective Measures of School Performance

For each year of the study, evaluators also looked at objective measures of school performance for the students surveyed. Mean math test scores remained the same from year to year, at or above average (52, 52, 50). Grade level increased for between 88 and 96 percent of the students and attendance rates were more or less stable (92 percent, 91 percent and 89 percent). These findings, however, may be misleading. This study looks at students who are at risk. There was no control group of at risk students who were not receiving services to whom a comparison could be made. However, it seems safe to say that, for at risk students, maintaining the same level of school performance is good. In fact, given the complex problems these students were confronting, not losing ground in any of these areas may be a real victory.

Life Skills

In the area of life skills, students clearly benefited from their participation in intervention services. They reported engaging in fewer negative behaviors and being more positive in their personal relationships with others.

This year, approximately half of the students surveyed said that, since receiving counseling, it has gotten easier to deal with conflict and anger, make decisions and stick to them, get along with classmates and family, and cope with stress. Only

seven to 21 percent of the students found that any of the life skills had gotten more difficult. Twenty to 37 percent of the students reported no change.

TABLE 4
STUDENTS' VIEWS OF PROGRESS IN LIFE SKILLS
SINCE PARTICIPATING IN COUNSELING SERVICES
1991-92 (n=891) and 1992-93 (n=220)

Item	Easier (%)		No Change (%)		Harder (%)		Not Sure (%)	
	91-92	92-93	91-92	92-93	91-92	92-93	91-92	92-93
Dealing with with conflict and anger	54	56	25	20	8	15	11	9
Making decisions and sticking to them	52	52	29	23	--	12	17	13
Coping with stress	49	47	23	21	11	21	16	11
Getting along with family	38	48	45	34	9	15	7	3
Getting along with classmates*		51		37		7		5

* These data were unavailable for 1991-92.

- Approximately half of all students reported that life skills were easier following counseling.

When asked how often they engaged in certain negative behaviors, between 63 and 90 percent of students answered never or once or twice. (See Table 5) The only behavior in which a substantial minority of students engaged was "lying to their parent or guardian" (28 percent).

TABLE 5
FREQUENCIES OF NEGATIVE BEHAVIORS
SINCE PARTICIPATING IN COUNSELING SERVICES
1992-93 (n=220)

Item	Never	Once or Twice	Three or More Times	No Reply
get involved in a fight	44	37	13	6
lie to parent or guardian	27	36	28	9
cut classes	57	22	16	5
do something illegal	74	16	9	1
get sent to the dean	52	27	15	6
think of harming yourself	62	26	8	4

- A majority of students reported that they never engaged in five of the six categories of negative behaviors.

Many students (48 percent) reported that, since participating in counseling, getting along with their families had gotten easier. This is comparable to last year's findings where 38 percent felt family relationships were easier, and most students (65 percent) felt loved at home.

Furthermore, while many students (49 percent) felt that their parents/guardians encouraged them to talk about their problems, 23 percent felt their family did not want them to talk. Thirty-two percent felt their parents/guardians did not understand them most of the time, 36 percent felt they were occasionally understood, and 32 percent felt their parents/

guardians generally misunderstood them. Other responses also indicated communication problems among family members. For example, many students (40 percent) reported being upset much more frequently than their parents realized. And many students (56 percent) reported feeling angry with their parents/guardians most of the time.

In the interviews, as well, students explained that their relationships with others had improved. Their relationships with their peers, teachers, and family members had all improved after participation in counseling.

A high school sophomore explained: "I can now talk to people about my feelings and also listen to other people better. I have learned that you must respect other people and have open ears. I try to understand other people's feelings and experiences."

Through counseling, many students were able to resist negative peer pressure. Some gave up old friends who they thought were a bad influence and pressured them to do things they no longer wanted to do. One student made new, healthier friends through the program: "If I wasn't in the counseling, I would also have different friends. I would hang out more with kids who cut and hang out themselves." Another student talked about how the things he has learned through counseling have helped him to better resist peer pressure: "Counseling changed my life. It has helped me to resist peer pressure because parents don't often sit you down and talk about sex and drugs, but we need to know these things."

Goals/Outlook for the future

Of the students who participated in the survey, most had a positive outlook for the future after receiving counseling. Many of them planned to attend college or graduate school (82 percent); only two percent did not expect to complete high school.

TABLE 6
STUDENTS' EDUCATIONAL PLANS

Education Plans	Percent
not finish H.S.	2
graduate H.S. or get a GED	8
vocational, trade or business school	8
attend college	68
attend graduate or professional school	14

- Most students planned to attend college (68 percent) and/or graduate or professional school (14 percent).

In addition, 80 percent of students said that they were looking forward to the years ahead. Only eight percent felt that life was hopeless.

In interviews, as well, students confided that they felt more optimistic about their futures. One high school senior planned on going to trade school, but perhaps more importantly he envisioned a happier, less lonely future for himself: "I think the future will go very well. I have a lot of talents. I see it differently than I used to. I used to think I'd get old alone,

without anyone to care for me. Now, I can better my own life, have a good career, a good life."

Many students intended to stay in school longer than they had before they began counseling and had greater expectations for their careers. One student described her hopes to become a veterinarian: "I want to get my high school diploma. I'm planning on going to college as long as I have to, to become a vet. I'm doing volunteer work at a vet hospital now."

One enthusiastic high school senior said of her future: "I'm excited. I have a lot of things to do on my own. I'm waiting to see how my decisions turn out. I am going to college in the fall. I see my future as being very independent."

CHARACTERISTICS OF COUNSELING THAT PROMOTE SUCCESS

Interviewers asked students and SAPIS to discuss what characteristics of counseling were most responsible for, or contributed most to, successful intervention.

Students' Views

Students described the specific characteristics of counseling that make it helpful to them: the trust and respect of, and for, the counselor; the ability to express difficult feelings; new, healthier friendships; and the sense of empowerment produced by a better understanding of the division between what they can and cannot change.

Student-counselor relationship. The importance of the counselors to the students should not be overlooked. It is through these counselors that they learned about trust and

caring. For many, counseling provided one of the few relationships in their lives in which they were treated as important and valuable in their own right. One young man was amazed when the counselor spoke to him in a gentle, caring way. "It is the way the counselor talks to you. Some people just have a way with other people. She doesn't talk down to you, she really cares what you think. Like you matter." A senior in high school, agreed, explaining that what is important is "... having a stable person to talk to, who won't fluctuate with what is going on around them." Most of the students echoed these feelings; all of them stressed the importance of a caring, consistent, responsible person in their lives.

Expressing and sharing feelings. Being able to talk about their problems was particularly important for students who had no one else to turn to. For one student, learning "...to open up and talk about my feelings was the best part. I used to bottle them up and then explode ...." A high school sophomore explained at greater length.

> Being in group is important. Most of the time you can't talk to your parents and tell them that you have a problem. Or, you talk to them and they don't sympathize with you. The counselors are different. Your parents will tell you all these reasons why you should or shouldn't do something, but the counselors don't do that. If I need advice they will give it, but they are not insisting and they help you decide for yourself. The counselors are like friends and you can trust them. You can tell them things and not be punished.

Healthier friendships. Another positive outcome of counseling that students reported was finding new friends and developing positive, close relationships with people. This was

especially the case for students in group counseling. One high school student talked about her experience in a women's group: "The best part ... was the friendship, the closeness. It was all just between us. If there was a problem we could go to each other or the SPARK counselor .... We were like a family, really close. Other students agreed. A high school senior thought the best part of group counseling was "... everyone showing that they cared. If you talked, they listened. When you had a problem, five hands would be raised to help you out ... you could tell everyone cared ...."

Recognizing their limitations. Counseling also helped students to recognize that, while there were aspects of their lives that they could not change, they could work on their feelings and ability to cope with difficult situations. As one student explained: "I can't change what is happening in my family, but I can change how I feel about it and how I cope with it." Another student had come to a similar conclusion: "Things have stayed the same, but I feel better about me."

SAPIS' Views

SAPIS agreed that successful intervention was more likely in the presence of certain condition. They thought that the support of teachers, the concern and involvement of parents, the motivation of the students, and healthy, supportive friendships and/or social networks were critical to the effectiveness of counseling.

Support of teachers. SAPIS felt that the support of teachers for the intervention was very important, particularly in terms of referring students for services. According to one SAPIS: "Classroom teachers are very supportive of the program and very helpful in bringing kids in. They'll tell me certain things they pick up on."

Support of a family member. Similarly, a supportive family member can be important in identifying a student for intervention services or simply being supportive of that student once in counseling. One counselor explained: "Sometimes the family does help. With one girl, it was the mother who initially came to me, The mother really worked with me."

Motivated student participants. The level of motivation that the student demonstrates is also critical to the success of counseling. In interviews, two of the SAPIS explained that progress in counseling is the result of the individual student's desire to find ways to solve his/her problems: "... they [students] want to find a mechanism that will help them solve their problems." Another counselor agreed: "Children want to know how to get rid of a hinderance caused by family members or their environment ...."

Healthy friendships and a supportive social network. Also critical to success, particularly with group counseling, was the development of a healthy support system where all of the students benefit in sharing their problems with one another. "For many students SPARK has become their home. It is a place where

someone is there to listen to, care for, and support them. They have made this group their family. They really do help each other."

DIFFICULTIES ASSOCIATED WITH COUNSELING

Interviewers also asked students and SAPIS to comment on the things that make successful counseling difficult.

Students' Views

Expressing and sharing painful feelings. The students responses were not critical of the counseling, but rather, discussed the difficulty of facing and sharing painful feelings. One sixth-grader commented that the hardest part of counseling was telling the counselor the truth about her father's alcoholism. Another high school student said, "The worst part was when I cried, but that was good too, because I felt better."

Confronting problems and responsibility. At times, students had difficulty listening to what the counselor told them, and they resisted: "Sometimes she would tell you something you don't want to hear. In the back of your head you know what she is saying is right, but you don't want to hear it .... It helps to hear it, and you do think about it."

Despite the difficulty students had confronting their feelings, virtually all of those interviewed felt that the confrontation was an important part of successful counseling.

Recognizing and accepting limitations. One of the greatest difficulties for students in counseling was dealing with an unchanging environment. As one student explained: "If a person

comes here, but your friends don't, then it could be hard to make changes. If you have a friend who still smokes and drinks, then it is hard to change." A SAPIS agreed with this assessment: "They are still coping with a difficult situation at home. They cannot change their home life, so it is frustrating to change and grow but not be able to rectify that kind of a situation."

Scheduling and time constraints. The limited time allowed for counseling was difficult for some students, as well. Some of those who were in counseling felt that they did not have enough time in counseling, that there were not enough sessions per week, or that individual sessions were too short. Some students wanted to see the counselor more than once a week. According to one student: "I go once a week. Sometimes I don't think it is enough. I would like two days, Monday and Thursday, so after the weekend, I could talk about what happened over the weekend." Another student thought group sessions were too short:

> Forty-five minutes. That seems too little. There is not enough time for all eight or nine people to talk. Sometimes it is hard to get a turn. Sometimes there is outside interference. People come to the door ... [or] the window, but then we ask them to leave and they go ... to wherever they are supposed to be.

Involuntary termination of services. Of those students who were no longer receiving services, about half (54 percent) terminated counseling of their own volition. Thirty-nine percent did not seek to terminate; indeed, many wished they could continue. They wanted more time to work on their problems. They talked about needing the counselor as a positive guide in their

lives. This was especially the case for those who had difficult home lives, without stable, supportive adults.

If the decision to stop counseling was not made by students, they were often less accepting of the break in services. In one high school, the women's group disbanded when the counselor left the school. A student in the group commented: "I would have liked to have seen it continue. The women's group--I could jump right back into that right away, I'm ready."

Another student in the same group explained:

> The teacher [SPARK] wasn't there anymore; she left. She was like a sister or a mother to me. I didn't know anyone else so I lost interest. At the beginning of the year, they asked me to come but I didn't want to go .... I wish she had stayed. I probably would have stayed if she did.

SAPIS' Views

According to the SAPIS, there were a number of factors that made successful counseling difficult. Often they were the converse of the things that facilitated successful counseling: unsupportive teachers or families and unmotivated students. In addition, scheduling and time constraints often interfered with successful service delivery.

Unhealthy/unsupportive family. Students' home lives were frequently mentioned as a possible hindrance to progress, particularly in the case of those students whose family situation includes substance abuse. "There are so many family issues--drugs, alcohol, parents in prison, a parent who's a prostitute, a parent with AIDS, parents lost through murder, health problems."

Often these students demonstrate a distorted perception of their home life and values in general. According to one SAPIS: "a lot of students think that their personal experiences are just a way of life and are not yet aware of the effect it has on them." For example, one of her students casually told her "my father's in jail, that's his problem .... Well, my father doesn't care anyway." She explained that for these students, "Behavior and problems are seen as two separate issues."

Two SAPIS also spoke of difficulties in working with COA/COSA students. In these groups students are often faced with extreme hardships at home. According to one SAPIS: "I have some children who are COSA'S. In one or two cases, one or both parents have died of AIDS through drug abuse."

Unsupportive school staff. Another problem, according to a SAPIS, was the attitude of school staff towards students with a history of behavior problems. "They are stigmatized by the staff [and] the teachers, and the students then feel like, 'if they have a reputation, then what is the point of trying to change it?' They are pegged."

Scheduling/time constraints. The disruption of the regular school routine was still another problem. According to one middle school SAPIS the changing of classes is sometimes disruptive. They "chill out" on the way to class, and they sometimes cut classes to "hang out" in the bathroom. This is particularly problematic because time is scarce in the schedules of both students and counselors.

The competition among teachers and administrators for time--class time, testing, rehearsals, and so forth--is a major problem, as well. According to one SAPIS: "Counseling seems to be the first thing that gets dropped." Others added: "We see them one period a week. It takes five minutes to get permission from the teacher ...." By the time they get to the counseling session, half the time has been used up.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Clearly, the students who participated in this study face serious problems every day of their lives. If effective, intervention is certainly a justifiable response to those problems. It is not, however, a panacea. While counseling can provide support, it cannot make problems magically disappear. Parents who are abusing substances will continue to do so. Students living with violence will still have to contend with violence. What counseling can do, is help students develop healthier ways of dealing with their problems.

Furthermore, intervention resources are so taxed that counselors cannot meet all of the needs of a student, much less of all of the troubled students. Not only are students often terminated from a case load because of limitations on the counselor's time, but the length of time that students are available to receive services is often cut short by a move to another school or graduation. Successful intervention is often a lengthy process and in the year or two that most students have access to counseling, they can only begin to address their problems. Given these limitations, it is truly remarkable that the SAPIS help students as much as they clearly do.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study indicate that counseling is indeed effective. Through their relationship with the counselor and the coping skills they develop, students not only deal better

with their problems, they actually improve the quality, if not the conditions, of their lives.

Need for Counseling

All of the students who participated in this study were attempting to deal with serious, sometimes debilitating problems in their lives. Many reported problems so severe and/or numerous that it was surprising to find them in school at all. The problems discussed by these students ranged from jealousy of a younger sister who was getting all of the parents' attention, to family violence, substance abuse, and incarcerated parents.

Many of the students that evaluators surveyed and interviewed felt they had nowhere to turn. Isolated and alone, at a loss for how to handle the nightmare of their daily lives, they turned to their school's SAPIS. In the counselor they found someone who would listen, was on their side, took their problems and feelings seriously, and held their hand through the hard times. They worked with the SAPIS to identify, understand, and cope with their problems and feelings.

Effectiveness of Counseling

Judging from the testimony of students and SAPIS, the counseling they received was very effective. Students reported that they no longer feel alone, and that, although their problems have not miraculously evaporated, they feel more equal to dealing constructively with them. Despite the substantial limitations of this service, students lives were vastly improved by participation in it.

Furthermore, in each of the substantive areas examined in this research--self-esteem, school performance, life skills, and outlook for the future--students reported great improvement. They felt better about themselves--they were changing their behavior in positive ways and they liked themselves more. They were proud of doing homework more consistently, skipping classes less often, and getting better grades, and of improved relationships with peers, teachers, and family members. Again, this is the result of changes in the students themselves; the problems around them continued to exist, but their ways of handling them changed. Not surprisingly, given these result, the students felt much more optimistic about their future and their ability to determine that future. They were more ambitious about what they expected to achieve. Nearly all of them planned to attend college and graduate or professional school.

One goal of this study was to determine whether there were differences between students who were in counseling and those who were no longer in counseling. Those who left counseling continued to feel positive about the changes in their lives. They maintained an improved self-image and coping skills and maintained their improvement in school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ultimately, it is not possible to derive definitive results about the long-term effects of counseling from a two-year study. Given the difficulties faced by students who have received counseling, the time in which they have been in services (two

academic years at most) is a short time in which to see profound changes and to know if changes will endure. It is a particularly short time in which to determine how those who have discontinued services will fare in the long term, and how much they might benefit from additional counseling.

Based on the findings of this study, OER evaluators recommend that:

- additional research follow students who have received counseling for more than two academic years to get a better understanding of the long-term effects of counseling;
- additional research follow students who have discontinued counseling (voluntarily and involuntarily) after a year or more of services to see if the positive effects of counseling endure;
- schools expand and strengthen counseling services by increasing administration and staff support of SAPIS' efforts. In-house training and workshops would keep personnel informed and enable them to facilitate SAPIS' efforts;
- SAPIS techniques be further explored and the results of that exploration disseminated to all SAPIS; and,
- liaisons between community and school-based counseling programs be developed and strengthened to provide more comprehensive services to high-risk students.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY SCORING

SURVEY SCORING

OER evaluators grouped student survey questions into three different categories: school performance, self-esteem, and life skills. They then scored responses to questions within each of these categories to determine whether students had improved, experienced no change, or experienced a set-back in these areas since participating in counseling services. This section outlines the content of these categories and the scoring schema used to analyze survey data.

The school performance cluster included questions about grades, homework, attendance, and relationships with teachers. The range of possible scores for the school performance scale was zero to 24, with scores of zero to nine showing a set-back in school performance, a score of ten being a stable score (school performance was the same as last year), and any score from 11 to 24 showing an improvement in school performance.

The personal skills cluster included questions about how students deal with anger and conflict, and how they make decisions and cope with stress. Scores for the personal skills scale could range from zero to 18, where scores of zero to three show a decrease in skills, a score of four signifies no change in skill level, and scores of five to 18 show improvement in personal skills, 18 being the most substantial improvement.

The self-esteem cluster included questions that address how students feel about their behavior and their capabilities compared to their peers. The possible scores on the self-esteem

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scale ranged from zero to 20, with zero to nine showing a decrease in self-esteem from the previous year, a score of ten showing no change in self-esteem, and any score from 11 to 20 showing improvement in self-esteem from the previous year, with 20 being the maximum score (most dramatic improvement).

APPENDIX B

SAPIS INTERVENTION TECHNIQUES

SAPIS INTERVENTION TECHNIQUES

In the course of this study, interviewers asked the SAPIS to talk about some of the techniques they used in counseling. The results were very informative, and are provided here for those who might be interested in learning more about the counseling techniques used by SAPIS.

Opening Dialogue

All SAPIS used methods of observation and discussion to determine a path of counseling. The choice of specific strategies depended on such factors as age, student's personality, the type of counseling, the goals, and the amount of time spent with the student. As one SAPIS explained: "When we first meet [a student] it depends on how the child is, loquacious or subtle .... It depends on the person you're working with. The goals that are set also depend on the person you're with."

SAPIS described a number of ways in which they help students to talk about their problems, and share their feelings. These techniques included therapeutic games, exercises, and arts and crafts activities, as well as time alone with the SAPIS away from the school setting.

The technique most frequently discussed (by all eight of the SAPIS interviewed) was the use of therapeutic games or exercises as a means of facilitating communication. One SAPIS described an exercise which she found particularly useful:

> [I use] various exercises .... The topics include resolving conflict, communicating, self-esteem, and setting goals.

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> The exercise on resolving conflicts has headed off a lot of fights by having them come in and use this--to duke it out with their head instead of their fists.

Many SAPIS used games and arts and crafts, particularly for students at the primary and lower intermediate levels. One SAPIS who worked with young students used "The Ungame," a board game that helps students to begin talking about themselves.

> Students move pieces around the board and pick a card that instructs them to share something about themselves. They really begin to share personal feelings about who they are. You get so much information from them and there are many openings for dialogue.

Some SAPIS took students out to breakfast or lunch, off the school campus, one-on-one, to give the student special attention or, sometimes, in recognition of a particular accomplishment.

Establishing Trust

One of the most important goals of counseling described by SAPIS was establishing trust. Generally, they achieved this goal by setting ground rules, ensuring confidentiality, and setting goals. These techniques helped to provide a safe environment in which students could talk about their problem, hence establishing an atmosphere of trust.

Structuring Counseling

SAPIS also described a number of ways in which they structured counseling in order to effect positive change. This included setting ground rules, strategies for problem-solving, and setting goals.

Setting Ground Rules. Setting ground rules either formally or informally was a critical technique used by counselors to

structure counseling. Many of these ground rules involved issues of confidentiality. SAPIS explained that establishing rules of confidentiality was essential for developing an atmosphere of trust, which was in turn critical to the success of the counseling. In support of this, half of the SAPIS interviewed stated that their most important concern was to allow students to "vent" in an environment that is safe and confidential.

For group counseling in particular, SAPIS felt that it was necessary to create a clear, explicit structure at the outset of counseling. This enabled SAPIS to guide their groups and build an environment of trust and open communication. In group sessions, they laid down explicit ground rules to protect the confidentiality of group members, and to promote a willingness to share and listen to others. One SAPIS described the ground rules which she used in her group: "In discussions, the kids use no names, no particulars .... I tell them 'don't say your mother or father did something.' Kids can use it against them." Another counselor had similar requirements: "The groups have rules. Everything is confidential. They can be terminated for revealing information and they must support their peers."

In some cases, SAPIS prefer written contracts to help establish trust and protect confidentiality: "The only written contracts I have are with the groups. I have rules about how they should treat each other, respecting each other, keeping things confidential. I rarely have contracts with individuals. I work based on trust. Establishing trust is critical." Another

SAPIS who used written contracts thought they were effective "... because they are so proud when they are good .... When there is progress, then they all feel better."

While establishing trust and ensuring confidentiality are equally important issues for individual counseling, because of the more private, one-on-one nature of individual counseling, contracts are not necessary.

SAPIS also use written and verbal contracts as incentives or disincentives to address certain types of behavior. For example, if the student meets certain goals, they will be rewarded with something, perhaps lunch at McDonalds. If they fail to honor certain commitments, such as not cutting classes, they will might give up a favorite possession. Another counselor used verbal contracts as a way to keep students focused on their goals. "I don't write them [contracts] down .... We don't get that specific. I will check on their progress, their grades, the amount of cutting they are doing, but we talk about it; it is not a checklist."

Problem solving. After structuring the counseling, SAPIS guide students by using creative methods of problem solving such as this one described by one of the SAPIS that OER evaluators interviewed:

> Once the group settles down and becomes comfortable, I just navigate and let them do story building .... One starts with what can be done and ends with "but ...;" then the next person has to see the problem and go on until "but ...,". It gives them self-confidence. I ask them what problems we can solve. The problems are often taken from situations going on in the community.

Goal Setting. Goal setting is another technique used by many SAPIS. By setting realistic and measurable goals, the counselor helps the student to an understanding of problem-solving: "If a student is working to correct lateness, the student will work toward decreasing lateness by a day, or if a student usually brings in homework three days, we try for four days. We try to make realistic goals."

Time limits are also used to ensure that the student remains committed and focused on the goals they have set: "Sometimes we set goals to meet in a certain amount of time, but I don't set strict time limits for counseling."

Judging from these techniques, the SAPIS are creative and resourceful. Their strategies for reaching at-risk students and helping them deal with difficult, often horrendous, lives, provide moving testimony to their commitment to these troubled youngsters. Further exploration of SAPIS strategies and dissemination of the results to all SAPIS could benefit at-risk students throughout the New York City public school system.